

## Building Codes

### Films

A series of films dealing with development, teenagers, public housing, Lincoln Center, and the social control of space, featuring films from Frederick Wiseman, Third World Newsreel, and Paper Tiger Television.

All programs take place in the basement theater at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, 97 Orchard Street, and begin at 7 PM.

August 16: Public Housing, by Frederick Wiseman

August 23: Films about environmental and spatial justice from Paper Tiger Television, curated by Mark Boulos

Breathless: A Toxic Newsflash (1992)

In 1992, New York City announced its plan to build seven garbage incinerators as a way to solve the city's growing waste problem. These toxic incinerators pose a great health threat to people and the environment. In addition, the decision to build the incinerators in only lower income, disenfranchised neighborhoods is the newest form of institutional racism. This award-winning video examines the economic, social and political aspects of this issue, and makes a strong case for alternative plans to incineration, such as extensive recycling and composting.

Play For Keeps: The Struggle to Save NYC Community Gardens (2000)

Community gardens are an endangered species in NYC. Esperanza (Hope), a 23-year old Lower East Side garden, was bulldozed by the Giuliani administration in January 2000 to make way for "affordable housing." Playing for Keeps asks the question: "affordable to whom?" and exposes the city's attempts to gentrify New York's poorest neighborhoods and destroy thriving communities.

Tompkins Square Park: Operation Class War on the Lower East Side (1992)

We won't give it all away here, but suffice it to say that the NYC government, police, developers and the local mainstream media have been caught in the act of forcibly gentrifying New York's Lower East Side. This tape looks at Tompkins Square Park, the homeless problem of the neighborhood, the Riot of '88 and events leading to the closing of the park, through local radio, video and community activists. Relevant to anyone who lives in contemporary urban society.

Paper Tiger Television (PTTV) is an open, non-profit, volunteer video collective. Through the production and distribution of our public access series, media literacy/video production workshops, community screenings and grassroots advocacy PTTV works to challenge and expose the corporate control of mainstream media. PTTV believes that increasing public awareness of the negative influence of mass media and involving people in the process of making media is mandatory for our long term goal of information equity. PTTV programs analyze and critique issues involving media, culture and politics. The shows feature scholars, community activists, critics and journalists addressing the ideological assumptions and the social meanings of the mainstream media as well as exploring the opportunities for alternative communications sources. Many programs examine a particular aspect of the communications industry, from print media to TV to movies, looking at its impact on public perception and opinion. Other videos represent the people and views which are largely absent from the mainstream media. The goal of the work is to provide viewers with a critical understanding of the communications industry. This critical consciousness is a necessary step towards more equitable and democratic control of information resources. Since 1981, Paper Tiger Television has appeared across the country on public access cable channels; the noncommercial, uncensored channels available for public use. The series is produced by a volunteer collective of media producers, educators and activists.

August 30: Films about spatial politics from Third World Newsreel, curated by Mark Boulos

Break and Enter (Rompiendo Puertas) (42 min./B&W/1970)

This film captures the militant antecedents to today's housing reclamation movement in New York City. In 1970, several hundred Puerto Rican and Dominican families reclaimed housing left vacant by the city. They pulled the boards off the doors, cleaned and repaired the buildings and moved in.

CLAIMING OPEN SPACES Austin Allen (87 min./Color/1995)

Claiming Open Spaces explores African-American culture as it clashes with the design of the modern American city. The film is both a critical examination of the design and histories of American urban open space, as well as a celebration of leisure, recreation and resistance.

Third World Newsreel (TWN) is an alternative media arts organization that fosters the creation, appreciation and dissemination of independent film and video by and about people of color. It supports the innovative work of diverse forms and genres made by artists who are intimately connected to their subjects through common bonds of ethnic/cultural heritage, class position, gender, sexual orientation and political identification. TWN promotes the self-representation of traditionally marginalized groups as well as the negotiated representation of those groups by



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artists who work in solidarity with them. Ultimately, whether documentary, experimental, narrative, traditional or non-traditional, the importance of the media promoted by the organization is its ability to effect social change, to encourage people to think critically about their lives and the lives of others, and to propel people into action.



**flash point.** The lowest temperature at which a liquid gives off sufficient vapor to form an ignitable mixture with air near the surface of the liquid or within the vessel used.

**flame spread rating.** The measurement of the comparative rate of propagation of flame over the surface of a material as determined by a fire test made in conformity with the test procedures of ASTM E-84, Standard Test Method for Surface Burning Characteristics of Building Materials.

**fire resistance rating.** The time in hours or fractions thereof that materials or their assemblies will withstand fire exposure as determined by a fire test made in conformity with the test procedures of ASTM E-119, Standard Test Methods for Fire Tests of Building Construction and Materials.

**incendiary device.** A breakable container designed to explode or produce uncontained combustion upon impact, containing flammable liquid and having a wick or a similar device capable of being ignited.

**arson.** A person is guilty of arson in the first degree when he intentionally damages a building or motor vehicle by causing an explosion or a fire and when (a) such explosion or fire is caused by an incendiary device propelled, thrown or placed inside or near such building or motor vehicle; or when such explosion or fire is caused by an explosive; or when such explosion or fire either (i) causes serious physical injury to another person other than a participant, or (ii) the explosion or fire was caused with the expectation or receipt of financial advantage or pecuniary profit by the actor; and when (b) another person who is not a participant in the crime is present in such building or motor vehicle at the time; and (c) the defendant knows that fact or the circumstances are such as to render the presence of such person therein a reasonable possibility.

**loitering.** A person is guilty of loitering when he (a) remains or wanders about in a public place for the purpose of begging or gambling, or (b) repeatedly beckons to, or repeatedly stops, or repeatedly attempts to stop, or repeatedly attempts to engage passers-by in conversation, or repeatedly stops or attempts to stop motor vehicles, or repeatedly interferes with the free passage of other persons, for the purpose of engaging in sexual behavior of a deviate nature; or (c) being masked or in any manner disguised by unusual or unnatural attire or facial alteration, remains or congregates in a public place with other persons so masked or disguised (except that such conduct is not unlawful when it occurs in connection with a masquerade party or like entertainment); or (d) remains in or about school grounds, not having any specific, legitimate reason for being there; or (e) remains in any transportation facility for the purpose of entertaining persons by singing, dancing or playing any musical instrument; or (f) is found sleeping therein; or (g) is unable to give a satisfactory explanation of his presence.

**harassment.** A person is guilty of harassment in the first degree when he or she follows another person by in or about a public place or places engages in a course of conduct which places such person in reasonable fear of physical injury.

**disorderly conduct.** A person is guilty of disorderly conduct when he engages in tumultuous behavior, or makes unreasonable noise, or uses abusive or obscene language, or makes an obscene gesture, in a public place.

**unlawful assembly.** A person is guilty of unlawful assembly when he assembles with four or more other persons for the purpose of engaging or preparing to engage with them in tumultuous and violent conduct likely to cause public alarm, or when, being present at an assembly which either has or develops such purpose, he remains there with intent to advance that purpose.

**occupancy group A, high hazard.** Includes buildings and spaces used for storing, manufacturing, or processing potentially-explosive products or materials. Typical occupant activities include: artificial flower manufacture; ammunition, explosives, and fireworks manufacture; dry cleaning or dyeing; using or storing gasoline; feather renovating; fruit ripening; hydrogenation; match manufacture; metal enamelling or japanning; paint and varnish manufacture; paint spraying or dipping; derivation of petroleum products by application of heat; rag sorting and storage; shoe polish manufacture; straw goods manufacture or broom corn storage; tar, pitch or resin processing.

**occupancy group B-1, storage.** Includes buildings and spaces used for storing any flammable or combustible materials that is likely to permit the development and propagation of fire with moderate rapidity. Typical material contents: bags (cloth, burlap, and paper); bamboo and rattan; baskets; belting (canvas and leather); books and paper in rolls or packs; buttons, including cloth-covered, pearl or bone; boots and shoes; cardboard and cardboard boxes; wearing apparel; cordage; furniture; furs; glue; mucilage, paste, and size; horn and combs other than celluloid; leather enamelling or japanning; linoleum; livestock; lumber; photo-engraving supplies; silk; soap; sugar; tobacco; cigars, cigarettes, and snuff; upholstery and mattresses; wax candles.

**occupancy group D-1, industrial.** Includes buildings and spaces in which the fabrication, assembly, manufacturing, or processing represents a moderate fire hazard due to the extent and nature of such operations, or to the materials involved. Typical occupant activities include: canning; dry cleaning or dyeing; electrolytic processes; glass manufacture; leather tanning; sugar refining; textile milling; upholstering; woodworking; and dressmaking.

**occupancy group F-2.** Shall include all outdoor structures and spaces.

**occupancy group F-3.** Shall include buildings and spaces in which the persons assembled are physically active and do not have a common center of attention.

**public place.** A place to which the public or a substantial group of persons has access, and includes, but is not limited to, highways, transportation facilities, schools, places of amusement, parks, playgrounds, and hallways, lobbies and other portions of apartment houses and hotels not constituting rooms or apartments designed for actual residence.



# paraSITE

**PARASITISM IS DESCRIBED AS A RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH A PARASITE TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY EXPLOITS THE ENERGY OF A HOST.<sup>1</sup>**

paraSITE proposes the appropriation of the exterior ventilation systems on existing architecture as a means for providing temporary shelter for homeless people.

**PARASITES LIVE ON THE OUTER SURFACE OF A HOST OR INSIDE ITS BODY IN RESPIRATORY ORGANS, DIGESTIVE ORGANS, VENOUS SYSTEMS, AS WELL AS OTHER ORGANS AND TISSUES.<sup>2</sup>**

The paraSITE units in their idle state exist as small, collapsible packages with handles for transport by hand or on one's back. In employing this device, the user must locate the outtake ducts of a building's HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning) system.

**FREQUENTLY A HOST PROVIDES A PARASITE NOT ONLY WITH FOOD, BUT ALSO WITH ENZYMES AND OXYGEN, AND OFFERS FAVOURABLE TEMPERATURE CONDITIONS.<sup>3</sup>**

The intake tube of the collapsed structure is then attached to the vent. The warm air leaving the building simultaneously inflates and heats the double membrane structure.

**BUT A HOST IS CERTAINLY NOT INACTIVE AGAINST A PARASITE, AND IT HINDERS THE DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION GROWTH OF PARASITES WITH DIFFERENT DEFENSE MECHANISMS, SUCH AS THE CLEANING OF SKIN, PERISTALTIC CONTRACTION OF THE DIGESTIVE APPARATUS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTIBODIES.<sup>4</sup>**

Many homeless people regarded this project as a tactical response, allowing the user to circumvent the defensive efforts of the city. Vents existing at street level are often designed to be "homeless-proof", with tilted metal grates, making them virtually impossible to sleep upon.

In his book, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis describes a similar war on homelessness in Los Angeles. He lists a series of these hindrances throughout the city.

"One of the most common, but mind-numbing, of these deterrents is the Rapid Transit District's new barrelshaped bus bench that offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting, while making sleeping utterly impossible. Such bumproof benches are being widely introduced on the periphery of Skid Row. Another invention, worthy of the Grand Guignol, is the aggressive deployment of outdoor sprinklers. Several years ago the city opened a 'Skid Row Park' along lower Fifth Street, on a corner of Hell. To ensure that the park was not used for sleeping - that is to say, to guarantee that it was mainly utilized for drug dealing and prostitution - the city installed an elaborate overhead sprinkler system programmed to drench unsuspecting sleepers at random during the night. The system was immediately copied by some local businessmen in order to drive the homeless away from adjacent public side walks. Meanwhile restaurants and markets have responded to the homeless by building ornate enclosures to protect their refuse. Although no one in Los Angeles has yet proposed adding cyanide to the garbage, as happened in Phoenix a few years back, one popular seafood restaurant has spent \$12,000 to build the ultimate bag-lady-proof trash cage: made of three-quarter inch steel rod with alloy locks and vicious outturned spikes to safeguard priceless moldering fishheads and stale french fries".<sup>5</sup>

**PARASITES RESPOND TO THIS DEFENSE BY ANCHORING THEMSELVES WITH HOOKS AND SUCKERS ONTO SKIN, OR DIGESTIVE MUCOUS MEMBRANE, AND BY DEVELOPING PROTECTIVE DEVICES AND SUBSTANCES WHICH LESSEN DEFENSIVE CAPABILITIES OF THEIR HOST.<sup>6</sup>**

The system by which the device attaches or is anchored to the building is designed to allow the structure to be adaptable. The intake tube can be expanded or tightened to fit the aperture of the vent through an adjustable lip made possible by elastic drawstrings. Hooks are attached to the metal louvers for reinforcement.

**THERE IS "TENSION" BETWEEN A HOST AND ITS PARASITE, SINCE THE HOST ENDEAVOURS TO GET RID OF THE FOREIGN BODY, WHILE THE PARASITE EMPLOYS NEW WAYS TO MAINTAIN THE CONNECTION WITH THE HOST.<sup>7</sup>**

The connection of the inflatable structure to the building becomes the critical moment of this project.

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From December 1999 until April 2001, I built fourteen paraSITE shelters to the specifications of fourteen homeless people in New York City. Most were built using temporary materials that were readily available on the streets (plastic bags, tape).

While these shelters were being used, they functioned not only as a temporary place of retreat, but also as a station of dissent and empowerment; many of the homeless users regarded their shelters as a protest device, and would even shout slogans like "We beat you Uncle Sam!". The shelters communicated a refusal to surrender, and made more visible the unacceptable circumstances of homeless life within the city.

For the pedestrian, paraSITE functioned as an agitational device. The visibly parasitic relationship of these devices to the buildings, appropriating a readily available situation with readily available materials elicited immediate speculation as to the future of the city: would these things completely take over, given the enormous number of homeless in our society? Could we wake up one morning to find these encampments engulfing buildings like ivy?

This project does not present itself as a solution. It is not a proposal for affordable housing. Its point of departure is to present a symbolic strategy of survival for homeless existence within the city, amplifying the problematic relationship between those who have homes and those who do not have homes.

The issue of homelessness is of global proportions and it is foolish to think that any one proposition will address all the issues associated with this problem. There are many different types of homeless people. The mentally ill, the chemically dependent, those who are unable to afford housing, men, women, families, even those who prefer this way of life are included among the vast cross section of homeless people in every urban instance. Each group of homeless has subjective needs based on circumstance and location. My project does not make reference to handbooks of statistics. Nor should this intervention be associated with the various municipal attempts at solving the homeless issue. This is a project that was shaped by my interaction as a citizen and artist with those who live on the streets.

<sup>1</sup> Dr Kazimir Tarmon, *Demove Ekologije*, Text distributed by P A R A S I T E Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana 1990

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, Vintage Press, New York 1992, p.2336 Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Dr Kazimir Tarmon, *Demove Ekologije* Text distributed by P A R A S I T E Museum of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana 1990

<sup>7</sup> Ibid



*"You shall dwell in Sukkoth seven days... in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in Sukkoth when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God"*  
Leviticus, 23:42

'Sukkah' is a portrait of an ephemeral city that appears within the 'permanent' city, latent in a biblical directive and the Talmud's precise codes, powered by the faith of its inhabitants, cyclically awakening, year after year.

Codes superimposed.

A fragile urban tissue whose basic unit is the Sukkah, a temporary and vulnerable dwelling structure that must be built outdoors and inhabited for seven days in order to commemorate the Exodus and the dwelling in the wilderness.

This video was filmed before, during, and after Sukkot on October 2000 (Tishri 5761) in the Jewish neighborhood in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in an area of approximately 80 blocks delimited by Broadway, Kent Avenue, Wallabout Street and Union Avenue.

'Sukkah'  
Video, 12;30 minutes  
Francisca Benitez, 2001

**SUKKAH** (Heb. סוכָה; "booth"), sixth tractate of the order *Mo'ed* in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. It deals, in five chapters, with laws relating to the festival of \*Sukkot (Tabernacles). The observances with which this tractate is primarily concerned are the "dwelling in booths" and the taking of the "four species".

"Throughout the seven days ('and nights,' Suk. 43a) of the festival, the *sukkah* must be regarded as one's principal abode, and the house merely a temporary residence."

The contents of the Mishnah are: chapter one: The making of the *sukkah*, chapter two continues the subject, and goes on to define the term "dwelling" in the *sukkah*. The question of



